

### AUTHORIZATION TO MAKE APPOINTMENTS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding the upcoming adjournment of the Senate, the President of the Senate, the President pro tempore, and the majority and minority leaders be authorized to make appointments to commissions, committees, boards, conferences, or interparliamentary conferences authorized by law, by concurrent action of the two Houses, or by order of the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

### SIGNING AUTHORIZATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that during this adjournment of the Senate, the majority leader be authorized to sign duly enrolled bills or joint resolutions.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

### VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, due to an unfortunate family health situation, Senator HATCH was unable to be present on the floor of the Senate today. If he had been able to attend today's vote on the conference report to accompany S. 2845, the intelligence reform bill, he would have voted for passage of the report.

### THE 108TH CONGRESS

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, as I mentioned earlier, we will shortly be closing the Senate. But while we are waiting to process some of the paperwork, I would like to make several brief statements, the first of which looks back at what has truly been an extraordinary period of legislative progress during this 108th Congress. From tax cuts to intelligence reform, we took on the big issues, and we made great strides for the American people.

One major reform bill over a congressional term is remarkable. Two makes this Congress truly unique. In both cases, efforts at reform have been stymied for decades. The 108th Congress finally broke through the logjam and delivered for the American people.

Our mission in the 108th Congress was clear—to expand freedom and opportunities, and to strengthen America's security. As we return to our home States over the course of the afternoon and tonight and over the next several days, we can all be proud of what we have accomplished.

As majority leader, most of the time I spend on the floor focuses on floor activity and events that are important to the entire country.

What I would like to do for several minutes is to speak directly to my fellow Tennesseans who see me many times working for the large domestic issues and sometimes do not hear me

talk directly about how that affects them in their everyday lives in Tennessee. Thus, I would like to take these moments to speak directly to my fellow Tennesseans about how what we have accomplished here in Washington will benefit the States.

It begins with that first reform bill, a bill that strengthened and improved Medicare for the first time in 40 years—really since the inception of that program. Medicare will offer a reform which allows the provision of affordable health care for prescription drugs. It is truly remarkable looking back. We have a health care plan, a health care program that focuses on our seniors' security, the health security for our seniors, and it has been without prescription drugs. Up until passage of this bill, the seniors have been denied coverage under Medicare for outpatient prescription drugs. Yet today—very different than even 20 or even 10 years ago—we know that prescription drugs are the most powerful tool in the arsenal of modern medicine in order to treat illness and to prevent illness.

Under the new Medicare law, seniors will now have access to a prescription drug benefit that will begin in January of 2006.

Over 40 million seniors and individuals with disabilities will soon enjoy true health care security. Without including prescription drugs, there is no way we can look a senior in the eye—it might be your mom, your dad, your grandparents—and say: Our government is going to help you with health care security. It is impossible because up until now prescription drugs simply were not included. But they are today because of the leadership, the efforts, and hard work of my colleagues in the Senate.

How many Tennesseans does that affect? There are 40 million seniors and individuals with disabilities nationwide affected by this legislation. In Tennessee, there are 870,000 Tennessee seniors who will benefit from this provision we passed in this Senate.

In October, I joined my staff as we crisscrossed the great State of Tennessee, describing to and helping people enroll in the prescription card drug program we passed. We wanted to let seniors know in these town meetings, seniors at retirement homes and retirement centers who are currently eligible for a Medicare-approved discount card which offers them savings of anywhere from 10 percent of what they are paying today to 20 percent, 25 percent on average, and sometimes as high as 50, 60, and 70 percent. We realized the impact of this legislation when we witnessed how much they were paying for their prescription drugs when we contrast it—it is all on the Internet today—with what they can save by having that prescription drug card which seniors are eligible for today.

In addition to that average 10 to 25 percent average discount, and sometimes 50, 60, 70 percent discounts, low-

income seniors will receive a \$600 annual subsidy in extra assistance to help pay for their prescription drugs. I mention it now because if low-income seniors apply for the card, they get \$600 over the next 30 days and then another \$600 after January 1 for next year. If you do not apply for the card today and wait until after January 1, you only have that \$600. I encourage seniors, especially low-income seniors who have not applied for that card, to do so today.

As I have said many times in the Senate, if you are listening to me now through our radio or C-SPAN, I encourage you, if you do not have the card, call 1-800-Medicare tomorrow and ask what that card can do for you. The benefits are huge. I encourage seniors to take advantage of it.

In addition to that major reform of Medicare, we passed \$350 billion in tax relief, which is the third largest tax cut in history. We have cut taxes across the board for 136 million hard-working, tax-paying Americans. For Tennessee, that includes 1.7 million who saw their tax bills go down in the year 2003 because of this legislation. It comes down to the philosophy, the belief we have that taxes are the people's money, not the Government's money. We think Americans simply pay too much, and thus this Senate acted, and people's taxes have all gone down.

Our goal is straightforward: To put more money back into the pockets of hard-working Americans, thereby giving those Americans the opportunity to save for the future, to invest, to spend on their children, their children's education or school books or school supplies, buying that computer or being able to go on the Internet—those tangible items, those real advantages that were made possible because of action in this Congress.

That is the same reason we acted to extend key parts of the President's tax relief plan for middle-class families. What does that mean? It means the marriage penalty. We acted to give true marriage penalty relief, and we acted to extend that key part of the President's plan. The \$1,000-per-child tax credit we acted to extend through the year 2010. We made sure low-income Americans will continue to benefit from that very low 10-percent tax bracket, benefiting in a direct fashion.

The Jobs and Growth Act of 2003, which we passed and was signed by the President, also provided Federal funds for States to carry out essential government services and to pay for Federal mandates, mandates passed on to the States. How much does that mean? We are always talking about such big dollars. For the State of Tennessee that provision of funds amounted to \$97 million for 2003 and another \$97 million for 2004.

Regarding Medicaid, an issue that is receiving a lot of focus in my own State of Tennessee—how best to reform Medicare so that it can be sustained